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UNCLAS TAIPEI 000578

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EAP/RSP/TC, EAP/PA, EAP/PD -
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DEPARTMENT PASS AIT/WASHINGTON

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: NORTH KOREA

"`Axis of Evil' Defying U.S. on Nuclear Proliferation"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language
"China Post" said in an editorial (2/15):

"North Korea is now the world's No. 8 nuclear power, if its claim is true. This poses a direct challenge to U.S. President W. Bush, who has pledged to confront tyrannical regimes that promoted terror and pursued the development of weapons of mass destruction. .

"By heightening the stakes, Pyongyang appears to be gambling that Washington and its allies will ultimately accept the idea of a nuclear North Korea.

"So far, brinkmanship has worked well for the North Koreans. Since the crisis erupted in 2002, Pyongyang has carefully crossed U.S. red lines, with little apparent consequence. .

"Regional resistance to a military strike against the North has mounted in the past year - and to many in the region, the idea of a nuclear North Korea is simply not as shocking as it once was. .

"America has little appetite for making concessions to North Korea. If the talks do not resume, the Bush administration could face a tough struggle to get the issue before the U.N. Security Council, where China holds a veto."

PAAL